

Sadleir, Thomas Ulick. *Georgian mansions in Ireland, with some account of the evolution of Georgian architecture and decoration*, Dublin University Press, 1915 (Pages 33-35).

Excerpt re James Alexander (and his wife, Anne Crawford) and Caledon

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– but this link, at December 2012, was disabled.

From its commanding position on the confines of Tyrone and Armagh, Caledon, or Kinard, as it was anciently called, has always been a place of strategic importance. In the seventeenth century it was the headquarters of Sir Phelim O'Neill, who for several years held the County of Tyrone against the English. After the confiscations it was granted to William Hamilton, one of the 1649 officers, who died 21st January, 1672. His eldest son, John Hamilton, of Caledon, married, 17th February, 1708, Lucy, second daughter of Anthony Dopping, Bishop of Meath, by whom he had an only daughter and heiress, Margaret, who married, as second wife, John, fifth Earl of Orrery. Thus it became the property and occasional residence of that wise and witty nobleman, distinguished for his epistolary correspondence, son of the better known but less able Lord Orrery, whose patronage of George Graham, a London watchmaker, induced the latter to give his name to an instrument for showing the motion of the celestial bodies. His lordship was given to hospitality, and often entertained that extraordinary character the Rev. Philip Skelton (*Burdy's Life of Skelton*, p. 349).

In his time the house stood nearer the town of Caledon, the site of the present residence being then occupied by an old castle (Morris's *Country Seats*, vol. iv, p. 79); writing in 1738, the year of his marriage, Lord Orrery calls it "old, low, and, though full of rooms not very large." It is evident from the correspondence published in "The Orrery Papers," from which we have just quoted (vol. i, p. 241), that his lordship took more pleasure in the demesne, which he extended and planted. But after his death the Boyle family ceased to reside, and the estate was neglected, being eventually sold by Edmund, seventh Earl of Orrery, to James Alexander, who erected the present commodious mansion in 1779 from a design by Thomas Cooley.

In the eighteenth century no career was more full of promise to intelligent and venturesome Irishmen than the service of the East India Company. Hardships had to be endured, difficulties had to be overcome, but still with good health many men returned with a competence after a comparatively short absence. And of these many, following the example of Lord Clive, whose purchase of an estate near Limerick is perpetuated by the mansion known as "Plassey," invested their savings in Irish land. These men were known as "Nabobs," and the greatest Nabob in Ireland was James Alexander. His rise was remarkable. Born in 1730, the third son of Nathaniel Alexander, an alderman of Derry, he went as a youth to India, where he occupied responsible positions in the Company's civil service, first at Fort St. George on the coast of Coromandel, and later at Fort William (Playfair's *British Family Antiquity*, iv, p. 483). Such was his success that in 1772, when little more than forty, he was able to return to Ireland with an immense fortune. At first he intended to reside in his native city of Londonderry, for which, in 1775, on the death of the Provost (Francis Andrews, Provost of Trinity College, Dublin), he was returned to Parliament; he had actually built a large house known as "Boom Hall" (so called from its proximity to the spot where the boom was placed across the Foyle, at the time of the memorable siege), but on purchasing Caledon he settled there, keeping a town house in Dublin to enable him to attend to his duties in Parliament.

Possessed of estates to the value of some £600,000 (*The Complete Peerage*, vol. ii, p. 485), Mr. Alexander now became one of the great Ulster landowners; he supported the Volunteer movement, raising a local corps, the Aughnacloy Volunteers, of which he was colonel, and attending the famous Dungannon Convention in 1783 as a delegate for the County Tyrone. He was High Sheriff of that county in 1780, and for Armagh in the following year. He was also a trustee of the linen manufacture for the Province of Munster, and patron of the Borough of Augher.

This “gentleman of large property and good character,” as he is called in a contemporary account of the Irish Members (*The Irish Parliament*, p. 1), married in London, on the 28th November, 1774, Anne, second daughter of James Crawford, of Crawfordsburn, County Down. In 1777 he and his wife visited Rome, where her portrait, already mentioned, was painted by Battoni [sic]; but in December of that year, soon after their return to Ireland, she died at his house in St. Stephen's Green, Dublin, shortly after the birth of her only son. From henceforth the bereaved husband seems to have devoted his life to attendance in Parliament (where, though undistinguished as a speaker, he consistently supported the measures of Government), and to improvements on his estate at Caledon, where he planted judiciously in the ornamental style (McEvoy's *Survey of County Tyrone*, pp. 170 and 175). He was twice re-elected for Derry, which he represented till 6th June 1790, when, in consideration of his political services, he was raised to the peerage as Baron Caledon, and on 2nd July following he took his seat in the House of Lords. Further honours followed — : viscounty in 1797, and an earldom three years later, the latter title being probably bestowed in return for his purchase of the borough of Newtown Ards, for which his son sat in the last Irish Parliament; the powerful influence of Marquess Cornwallis, Lord Lieutenant, who stayed at Caledon in 1799 (*The Cornwallis Correspondence*, iii, p. 140), also conducing to his advancement. He supported the Union, and as owner of a disfranchised borough was awarded the usual £15,000 compensation. His active career was terminated at his house in Dublin, 1 Rutland Square, on 23rd March, 1802; he left one son, Dupre, second Earl of Caledon, and two daughters, of whom Mabella married Andrew, eleventh Lord Blayney.

As we have seen, the mansion house at Caledon was much enlarged by the second Earl, a man of considerable ability and artistic taste. It is not our intention to deal fully with his career; but as he became entitled to a large inheritance at a comparatively early age, he deserves our respect for devoting himself to an active life in the service of his country. He was a Knight of St. Patrick, and also first Governor of the Cape of Good Hope. Most of the oriental china in the house was bought by him in Holland shortly after the Peace following Waterloo. He and his father-in-law, Lord Hardwicke, brought over a whole shipload to stock their respective mansions, both now the property of this family. At a later period he was interested in art and literature, his accomplished tastes leading, in 1831, to his election as a member of the Dilettanti (*History of the Society of Dilettanti*, by Lionel Cust, p. 168). His relations with his tenants were of the happiest; he built excellent cottages, laid out the present town of Caledon, in which he expended £3,000 on a Court House, and spared no expense in his efforts to improve the neighbourhood. “Lord Caledon,” writes Inglis (*Ireland in 1834*, vol. ii, p. 277), “is all that could be desired — a really good resident country gentleman.” At his death the handsome column in the demesne at Caledon, surmounted by his statue, the work of the sculptor Kirk, was erected to his memory by public subscription. His great-grandson, Erik James, fifth Earl of Caledon, an officer in the 1st Life Guards, is the present proprietor of the estate.